

What Was the Reformation?

by Hilaire Belloc

The movement generally called "The Reformation" deserves a place apart in the story of the great heresies; and that for the following reasons:

1. It was not a particular movement but a general one, *i.e.*, it did not propound a particular heresy which could be debated and exploded, condemned by the authority of the Church, as had hitherto been every other heresy or heretical movement. Nor did it, after the various heretical propositions had been condemned, set up (as had Mohammedanism or the Albigensian movement) a separate religion over against the old orthodoxy. Rather did it create a certain separate *moral atmosphere* which we still call "Protestantism." It produced indeed a crop of heresies, but not *one* heresy - and its characteristic was that all its heresies attained and prolonged a common savour: that which we call "Protestantism" today.

2. Though the immediate fruits of the Reformation decayed, as had those of many other heresies in the past, yet the disruption it had produced remained and the main principle reaction against a united spiritual authority - so continued in vigour as both to break up our European civilization in the West and to launch at last a general doubt, spreading more and more widely. None of the older heresies did that, for they were each definite. Each had proposed to supplant or to rival the existing Catholic Church; but the Reformation movement proposed rather to dissolve the Catholic Church - and we know what measure success has been attained by that effort!

The most important thing about the Reformation is to understand it. Not only to follow the story of it stage by stage - a process always necessary to the understanding of any historical matter - but to grasp its essential nature.

On this last it is easy for modern people to go wrong, and especially modern people of the English-speaking world. The nations we English-speaking people know are, with the exception of Ireland, predominantly Protestant; and yet (with the exception of Great Britain and South Africa) they harbour large Catholic minorities.

In that English-speaking world (to which this present writing is addressed) there is full consciousness of what the Protestant spirit has been and what it has become in its present modification. Every Catholic who lives in that English-speaking world knows what is meant by the Protestant temper as he knows the taste of some familiar food or drink or the aspect of some familiar vegetation. In a less degree the large Protestant majorities - in Great Britain it is an overwhelming Protestant majority - have *some* idea of what the Catholic Church is. They know

much less about us than we know about them. That is natural, because we proceed from older origins, because we are universal while they are regional and because we hold a definite intellectual philosophy whereas they possess rather an emotional and indefinite, though characteristic, spirit.

Still, though they know less about us than we know about them, they are aware of a distinction and they feel a sharp division between themselves and ourselves.

Now, both Catholics and Protestants today tend to commit a capital historical error. They tend to regard Catholicism on the one side, Protestantism on the other, as two mainly opposed religious and moral systems, producing, *from the very origins of the movement*, opposed and even sharply contrasted moral characters in their individual members. They take this duality for granted even in the beginning. Historians who write in English on either side of the Atlantic talk of so-and-so (even in the early part of the sixteenth century) as a "Protestant" and so-and-so-other as a "Catholic." It is true that contemporaries also used these terms, but they used the words in a very different sense and with very different feelings. For a whole lifetime after the movement called the "Reformation" had started (say from 1520 to 1600), men remained in an attitude of mind which considered the whole religious quarrel in Christendom as an *Oecumenical* one. They thought of it as a debate in which *all* Christendom was engaged and on which some kind of ultimate decision would be taken for *all*. This decision would apply to Christendom as a whole and produce a general religious peace.

That state of mind lasted, I say, a whole long lifetime - but its general atmosphere lasted much longer. Europe was not resigned to *accept* religious disunion for yet another lifetime. The reluctant resolve to make the best of the disaster does not become evident - as we shall see - till the Peace of Westphalia, 130 years after Luther's first challenge, and the *complete* separation into Catholic and Protestant groups was not accomplished for another fifty years: say, 1690-1700.

It is of first importance to appreciate this historical truth. Only a few of the most bitter or ardent Reformers set out to destroy Catholicism as a separate existing thing of which they were conscious and which they hated. Still less did most of the Reformers set out to erect some other united counter-religion.

They set out (as they themselves put it and as it had been put for a century and a half before the great upheaval) "to reform." They professed to purify the Church and restore it to its original virtues of directness and simplicity. They professed in their various ways (and the various groups of them differed in almost everything except their increasing reaction against unity) to get rid of excrescences, superstitions and historical falsehoods - of which, Heaven knows, there was a multitude for them to attack.

On the other side, during this period of the Reformation, the defence of orthodoxy was occupied, not so much in destroying a specific thing (such as the spirit of Protestantism is today), as in restoring unity. For at least sixty years, even on to eighty years - more than the full active lifetime of even a long-lived man - the two forces at work, Reform and Conservatism, were of this nature: interlocked, each affecting the other and each hoping to become universal at last.

Of course, as time went on, the two parties tended to become two hostile armies, two separate camps, and at last full separation was accomplished. What had been a united Christendom of the West broke into two fragments: the one to be henceforward the Protestant Culture, the other the Catholic Culture. Each henceforward was to know itself and its own spirit as a thing separate from and hostile to the other. Each also grew to associate the new spirit with its own region, or nationality, of City-State: England, Scotland, Hamburg, Zurich and what not.

After the first phase (which covered, naturally enough, about a lifetime) came a second phase covering another lifetime. If one is to reckon right up to the expulsion of the Catholic Stuart kings in England, it covered rather more than a lifetime - close on one hundred years.

In this second phase the two worlds, Protestant and Catholic, are consciously separated and consciously antagonistic one to the other. It is a period filled with a great deal of actual physical fighting: "the Religious Wars" in France and in Ireland, above all in the widespread German-speaking regions of Central Europe. A good deal before this physical struggle was over the two adversaries had "crystallized" into permanent form. Catholic Europe had come to accept as apparently inevitable the loss of what are now the Protestant states and cities. Protestant Europe had lost all hope of permanently affecting with its spirit that part of Europe which had been saved for the Faith. The new state of affairs was fixed by the main treaties that ended the religious wars in Germany (half way between 1600 and 1700). But the struggle continued sporadically for a good forty years more, and parts of the frontiers between the two regions were still fluctuating even at the end of that extra period. Things did not finally settle down into two permanent worlds till 1688 in England, or, even, 1715, if we consider all Europe.

To get the thing clear in our minds, it is well to have fixed dates. We may take as the origin of the open struggle the violent upheaval connected with the name of Martin Luther in 1517. By 1600 the movement as a general European movement had fairly well differentiated itself into a Catholic, as against Protestant, world, and the fight had become one as to whether the first or the second should predominate, not as to whether the one philosophy or the other should prevail throughout our civilization; although, as I have said, many still hoped that *at last* the old Catholic tradition would die out, or that *at last* Christendom as a whole would return to it.

The second phase begins, say, as late as 1606 in England, or a few years earlier on the Continent and ends at no precise date, but generally speaking, during the last twenty years of the seventeenth century. It ends in France earlier than in England. It ends among the German States - from exhaustion more than for any other reason - even earlier than it ends in France, but one may say that the idea of a direct religious struggle was fading into the idea of a political struggle by 1670 or 1680 or so. The active religious wars filled the first part of this phase, ending in Ireland with the middle of the seventeenth century, and in Germany a few years earlier, but the thing is still thought of as being a religious affair as late as 1688 or even a few years later in those parts where conflict was still maintained.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, in Cromwell's time, 1649-58, Great Britain was definitely Protestant, and would remain so - though possessed of a large Catholic minority.[1] The same was true of Holland. Scandinavia had long been made Protestant for good and all, by

her rich men, and so were many Principalities and States of the German Empire, mainly the north. Others (mainly in the south) would clearly be Catholic for the future - in bulk.

Of the Low Countries (what we now call Holland, and Belgium) the north (Holland) with a very large Catholic minority was to be officially Protestant, while the south (Belgium) was to be almost wholly Catholic with hardly any Protestant element at all.

The Swiss Cantons divided, much as the German States did. Some went Catholic, some Protestant. France was to be Catholic, in the main, but with a powerful and wealthy, though not very large, Protestant minority: 10 per cent, at the very most, probably nearer 5 per cent. Spain and Portugal and Italy had settled down to retain for good the traditions of Catholic Culture.

So we are about to follow the story of two successive epochs, gradually changing in character. The first, from a little before 1520 to around 1600, an epoch of universal debate and struggle. The second an epoch of clearly opposed forces, becoming political as much as religious, and more and more sharply defined into hostile camps.

When all this was over, towards the end of the seventeenth century - 1700 - more than two hundred years ago - there came new developments: the spread of doubt and an anti-Catholic spirit *within the Catholic culture itself*; while within the Protestant culture, where there was less definite doctrine to challenge, there was less internal division but an increasing general feeling that religious differences must be accepted; a feeling which, in a larger and larger number of individuals, grew into the, at first, secret but later avowed attitude of mind that nothing in religion could be certain, and therefore that toleration of all such opinions was reasonable.

Side by side with this development went the political struggle between nations originally of Catholic culture and the regions of the new Protestant culture. During the nineteenth century the preponderance of power gradually fell to the Protestants, led by the two chief anti-Catholic powers, England and Prussia, symbolized sometimes under their capital cities as "London and Berlin." It has been said that "London and Berlin were the twin pillars of Protestant domination during the nineteenth century": and that judgment is sound.

This, then, is the general process we are about to follow. A lifetime of fierce conflict between ideas everywhere; another lifetime of growing regional separation, becoming more and more a political rather than a religious conflict. Then, a century - the eighteenth - of increasing scepticism, beneath which the characteristics of the Catholic and Protestant culture were maintained though hidden. Then another century - the nineteenth - during which the political struggle between the two cultures, Catholic and Protestant, was obvious enough and during which the Protestant culture continually increased its political power at the expense of the Catholic, because the latter was more divided against itself than the former. France, the leading power of Catholic culture, was half of it anti-clerical in Napoleon's day, when England was, as she remains, solidly anti-Catholic.

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The origins of that great movement which shook and split for generations the spiritual world, and which we call the "Reformation," the preparation of the materials for that explosion which shattered Christendom in the sixteenth century, cover two full lifetimes, at least, *before* the first main act of rebellion against religious unity in 1517.

Many have taken as the starting point of the affair the abandonment of Rome by the Papacy and its establishment at Avignon, more than two hundred years before Luther's outbreak.

There is some truth in such an attitude, but it is a very imperfect truth. Everything has a cause, and every cause has another cause behind it, and so on. The abandonment of Rome by the Papacy, soon after 1300, did weaken the structure of the Church but was not in itself fatal. It is better, in seeking the main starting point, to take that awful catastrophe, the plague called today "the Black Death" (1348-50), forty years after the abandonment of Rome. It might even be more satisfactory to take as a starting point the opening of the great schism, nearly thirty years after the Black Death, after which date, for the better part of an active lifetime, the authority of the Catholic world was almost mortally wounded by the struggles of Popes and anti-popes, rival claimants to the awful authority of the Holy See. Anyhow, before the Black Death, 1348-50, and before the opening of the schism, you have to begin with the abandonment of Rome by the Popes.

The Holy See, as the central authority of all Christendom, had long been engaged in a mortal quarrel with the lay power of what was called "The Empire," that is, the Emperors of German origin who had general, but very complicated and varied and often only shadowy, authority, not only in the German-speaking countries, but over northern Italy and a belt of what is now eastern France, as also over the Low Countries and certain groups of the Slavs.

A lifetime before the Popes left Rome this struggle had been coming to a climax under one of the most intelligent and most dangerous men that ever ruled in Christendom, the Emperor Frederick II, whose power was the greater because he had inherited not only the old diversified rule over the German States and the Low Countries and what we call today eastern France, but also eastern and southern Italy. The whole of central Europe, except the States governed immediately by the Pope in the middle of Italy, were more or less under Frederick's shadow, under his claim to power. He challenged the Church. The Papacy won, and the Church was saved; but the Papacy as a political power had become exhausted in the struggle.

As so often happens, a third party benefited by a violent duel between two others. It was the king of France who now became the chief force, and for seventy years, that is, during all the bulk of the fourteenth century (from 1307 to 1377) the Papacy became a French thing, the Popes residing in Avignon (where their huge palace remains to this day, a splendid monument of that time and its meaning) and the men elected to fill the office of Pope being, after the change, mainly French.

This change (or rather interlude, for the change was not permanent) fell just at the moment when a national spirit was beginning to develop in the various regions of Europe, and particularly in France. All the more did the peculiarly French character of the Papacy shock the

conscience of the time. The Papacy ought of its nature to be Universal. That it should be National was shocking to the western European of that time.

The tendency of western Christendom to divide into separate compartments and to lose the full unity which it had possessed for so long was increased by the failure of the Crusades - which as long as they were active had been a unifying force, presenting a common ideal to all Christian chivalry. This tendency was increased also by what is called the Hundred Years War; not that it lasted one hundred years continuously, but that from the first battle to the last you may reckon nearly that space of time.

The Hundred Years War was a struggle between the French-speaking dynasty, ruling in England and supported by the French-speaking upper classes - for all the upper classes in England still spoke French even in the late fourteenth century - and the equally French-speaking monarchy and upper classes in France itself. The English, French-speaking royal family was called *Plantagenet*, and the French royal family we call *Capetian*.

The French Capetian monarchy had descended regularly from father to son for generations until there came a disputed succession after 1300, soon after the Pope went to Avignon in France. The young Edward Plantagenet, the third of that name, the French-speaking King of England, claimed the French crown through his mother, the sister of the last King, who had no son. The Capetian King Philip, cousin of the dead King, claimed as a male, his lawyers inventing a plea that women could neither inherit nor transmit the French monarchy. Edward won two remarkable campaigns, those of Crecy and Poitiers, and nearly succeeded in establishing his claim to be King of France. Then came a long lull in which the Plantagenet forces were driven out of France, save in the southwest. Later came a rally of the Plantagenets, after the usurping Lancastrian branch of that family had made themselves Kings of England, and consolidated their unjust power. They kindled the war in France again (under Henry V of England) and came much nearer to success than their forerunners, because France was in a state of civil war. Indeed, the great soldier of this period, Henry V of England, marrying the daughter of the King of France and saying that her brother was illegitimate, actually succeeded in getting his little son crowned as French King. But the dispute was not over.

We all know how that ended. It ended in the campaigns of Joan of Arc and her successors and the collapse of the Plantagenet claim for good and all. But the struggle had, of course, enhanced national feeling, and every strengthening of the now growing national feeling in Christendom made for the weakening of the old religion.

In the midst of this fell something much more important even than such a struggle, and something which, as I have said above, had most to do with the deplorable splitting up of Christendom into separate independent nations. This woeful incident was the terrible plague, now called "the Black Death." The fearful disaster broke out in 1347 and swept the whole of Europe from east to west. The marvel is that our civilization did not collapse, for certainly one-third of the adult population died, and probably more.

As is always the case in great catastrophes, there was a "time-lag" before the full effects were felt. It was in the 1370's and the 1380's that those effects began to be permanent and pretty much universal.

In the first place, as always happens when men are severely tried, the less fortunate men became violently hostile towards the more fortunate. There were risings and revolutionary movements. Prices were disturbed, there was a snapping of continuity in a host of institutions. The names of the old institutions were kept, but the spirit changed. For instance, the great monasteries of Europe kept their old riches but fell to half their numbers.

The important part of these effects of the Black Death was the appearance of England gradually, after about a lifetime, as a country united by a common tie. The upper classes ceased to talk French, and the various local popular dialects coalesced into a language that was becoming the literary language of a new nation. It is the period of *Piers Plowman* and of Chaucer.

The Black Death had not only shaken the physical and political structure of European society. It had begun to affect the Faith itself. Horror had bred too much despair.

Another direct result of the Black Death was the "Great Schism" in the Papacy. The warring Kings of France and England and the rival civil factions in France itself and the lesser authorities of the smaller states took sides continually for the one claimant to the Papacy or the other, so that the whole idea of a central spiritual authority was undermined.

The growth of vernacular literatures, that is of literatures no longer generally expressed in Latin, but in the local speech (northern or southern French, or English, or High or Low German) was another disruptive factor. If you had said to a man one hundred years before 1347 "Why should your prayers be in Latin? Why should not our churches use our own language?" your question would have been ridiculed; it would have seemed to have no meaning. When it was asked of a man in 1447, towards the declining end of the Middle Ages, with the new vernacular languages beginning to flourish, such a question was full of popular appeal.

In the same way opponents of central authority could point to the Papacy as a mere local thing, an Italian, southern thing. The Pope was becoming as much an Italian Prince as he was head of the Church. Such a social chaos was admirably adapted for specific heresies; that is, for particular movements questioning particular doctrines. One very favourite opinion, founded on the social disturbances of the time, was the idea that the right to property and office went with Grace; that authority, political or economic, could not rightly be exercised save by men in a State of Grace - a most convenient excuse for every kind of rebellion!

Grafted on to this quarrel were violent quarrels between laity and the clergy. The endowments of the Church were very large, and corruption, both in monastic establishments and among the seculars, was increasing. Endowment was beginning to be treated more and more as a revenue to be disposed of for rewards or any political programme. Even one of the best of the Popes of that time, a man fighting the corrupt habit of uniting many endowments in one hand, himself held seven bishoprics as a matter of course.

National and racial feeling took advantage of the confusion in movements like that of the Hussites in Bohemia. Their pretext against the clergy was a demand for the restoration of the cup at Communion to the laity. They were really inspired by the hatred of the Slav against the German. Huss is a hero in Bohemia to this day. During the Great Papal Schism efforts had been made to restore a central authority on a firm basis by the calling of great councils. They called on the Popes to resign. They confirmed new appointments in the Papacy. But in the long run, by shaking the authority of the Holy See, they weakened the idea of authority in general.

After such confusions and such complicated discontents, *particularly the spreading and increasing discontent with the worldliness of the official clergy*, came a vivid intellectual awakening; a recovery of the classics and especially a recovery of the knowledge of Greek. It filled the later fifteenth century - (1450-1500). At the same time the knowledge of the physical world was spreading. The world (as we put it now) was "expanding." Europeans had explored the Atlantic and the African shores, found their way to the Indies round the Cape of Good Hope, and before the end of that century, come upon a whole new world, later to be called America.

Through all this ferment went the continual demand: "Reform of the Church!" "Reform of head and members!" Let the Papacy be recalled to its full spiritual duties and let the corruption of the official Church be purged. There was a rising, stormy cry for simplicity and reality, a rising stormy indignation against the stagnant defence of old privileges, a universal straining against rusted shackles no longer fitted to European society. The cry for change by amendment, for a purification of the clerical body and restoration of spiritual ideals, may be compared to the cry today (centred not on religion but on economics) which demands a spoliation of concentrated wealth for the advantage of the masses.

The spirit abroad, A.D. 1500-1510, was one in which any incident might produce a sudden upheaval just as the incidents of military defeat, the strain of so many years' warfare, produced the sudden upheaval of Bolshevism in the Russia of our day.

The incident that provoked an explosion was a minor and insignificant one - but as a date of origin it is tremendous. I mean, of course, the protest of Luther against the abuse (and, for that matter, against the use) of indulgences.

That date, the Eve of All Saints, 1517, is not only a definite date to mark the origin of the Reformation, but it is the true initial moment. Thenceforward the tidal wave grew overwhelming. Till that moment the conservative forces, however corrupt, had felt sure of themselves. Very soon after that movement their certitude was gone. The flood had begun.

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I must here reiterate for purposes of clarity, the very first thing for anyone to realize who wants to understand the religious revolution which ended in what we call today "Protestantism." That revolution, which is generally called "The Reformation," fell into two fairly distinct halves, each corresponding roughly to the length of a human life. Of these the first phase was *not* one of conflict between two religions but a conflict within one religion; while the second phase was one

in which a distinct new religious culture was arising, opposed to and separate from the Catholic culture.

The first phase, I repeat (roughly the first lifetime of the affair), was *not* a conflict between "Catholics and Protestants" as we know them now; it was a conflict within the boundaries of one Western European body. Men on the extreme left wing, from Calvin to the Prince Palatine, still thought in terms of "Christendom." James I at his accession, while denouncing the Pope as a three-headed monster, still violently affirmed his right to be of the Church Catholic.

Till we have appreciated that, we cannot understand either the confusion or the intense passions of the time. What began as a sort of spiritual family quarrel and continued as a spiritual civil war, was soon accompanied by an actual civil war in arms. But it was *not* a conflict between a Protestant world and a Catholic world. That came later, and when it came, it produced the state of affairs with which we are all familiar, the division of the white world into two cultures, Catholic and anti-Catholic: the breakup of Christendom by the loss of European unity.

Now the most difficult thing in the world in connection with history, and the rarest of achievement, is the seeing of events as contemporaries saw them, instead of seeing them through the distorting medium of our later knowledge. *We* know what was going to happen; contemporaries did not. The very words used to designate the attitude taken at the beginning of the struggle change their meanings before the struggle has come to an end. So it is with the Catholic and Protestant; so it is with the word "Reformation" itself.

The great religious upheaval which so swiftly turned into a religious revolution was envisaged by the contemporaries of its origins as an effort to put right the corruptions, errors and spiritual crimes present in the spiritual body of Christendom. At the beginning of the movement no one worth consideration would have contested for a moment the necessity for reform. All were agreed that things had got into a terrible state and threatened a worse future unless something were done. The crying necessity for putting things right, the clamour for it, had been rising during more than a century and was now, in the second decade of the sixteenth century, come to a head. The situation might be compared to the economic situation today. No one worth consideration today is content with industrial capitalism, which has bred such enormous evils. Those evils increase and threaten to become intolerable. Everyone is agreed that there must be reform and change.

So far so good: You might put it this way: there was no one born between the years 1450-1500 who did not, by the critical date 1517, when the explosion took place, see that something had to be done, and in proportion to their integrity and knowledge were men eager that something *should* be done - just as there is no one alive today, surviving from the generation born between 1870 and 1910, who does not know that something drastic must be done in the economic sphere if we are to save civilization.

A temper of this kind is the preliminary condition of all major reforms, but immediately such reforms proceed to action three characters appear which are the concomitants of all revolutions, and the right management of which alone can prevent catastrophe. The first character is this:

Change of every kind and every degree is proposed simultaneously, from reforms which are manifestly just and necessary - being reversions to the right order of things - to innovations which are criminal and mad.

The second character is that the thing to be reformed necessarily resists. It has accumulated a vast accretion of custom, vested interests, official organization, etc., each of which, even without direct volition, puts a drag on reform.

Thirdly (and this is much the most important character) there appear among the revolutionaries an increasing number *who are not so much concerned to set right the evils which have grown up in the thing to be reformed, as filled with passionate hatred of the thing itself - its essential, its good, that by which it has a right to survive*. Thus today we have in the revolt against industrial capitalism men proposing all at once every kind of remedy - guilds, partial State Socialism, the safeguarding of small property (which is the opposite of Socialism), the repudiation of interest, the debasing of currency, the maintenance of the unemployed, complete Communism, national reform, international reform, even anarchy. All these remedies and a hundred others are being proposed pell-mell, conflicting one with another and producing a chaos of ideas.

In the face of that chaos all the organs of industrial capitalism continue to function, most of them jealously struggling to preserve their lives. The banking system, great interest-bearing loans, proletarian life, the abuse of machinery and the mechanization of society - all these evils go on in spite of the clamour, and more and more take up the attitude of stubborn resistance. They put forward consciously or half-consciously the plea, "If you upset us, there will be a crash. Things may be bad, but it looks as though you were going to make them worse. Order is the first essential of all," etc., etc. . . .

Meanwhile the third element is appearing quite manifestly: the modern world is getting fuller and fuller of men who so hate industrial capitalism that this hatred is the motive of all they do and think. They would rather destroy society than wait for reform, and they propose methods of reform which are worse than the evils to be remedied - they care far more for the killing of their enemy than they do for the life of the world.

All this appeared in what I here call "*The Turmoil*," which lasted in Europe roughly from 1517 to the end of the century, a lifetime of a little over eighty years. In the beginning all good men with sufficient instruction and many bad men with equally sufficient instruction, a host of ignorant men, and not a few madmen, concentrated upon the evils which had grown up in the religious system of Christendom. Such were the first Reformers.

No one can deny that the evils provoking reform in the Church were deep rooted and widespread. They threatened the very life of Christendom itself. All who thought at all about what was going on around them realized how perilous things were and how great was the need of reform. Those evils may be classified as follows:

Firstly (and least important) there was a mass of bad history and bad historical habits due to forgetfulness of the past, to lack of knowledge and mere routine. For instance, there was a mass

of legend, most of it beautiful, but some of it puerile and half of it false, tacked on to true tradition. There were documents upon which men depended as authoritative which proved to be other than what they pretended to be, for example, the famous false Decretals, and particularly that one called the Donation of Constantine, which, it had been thought, gave its title to the temporal power of the Papacy. There was a mass of false relics, demonstrably false, as for instance (among a thousand others) the false relics of St. Mary Magdalen, and innumerable cases in which two or more competing objects pretended to be the same relic. The list could be extended indefinitely, and the increase of scholarship, the renewed discovery of the past, particularly the study of the original Greek documents, notably the Greek New Testament, made these evils seem intolerable.

The next group of evils was more serious, for it affected the spiritual life of the Church in its essence. It was a sort of "crystallization" (as I have called it elsewhere) or, if the term be preferred, an "ossification" of the clerical body in its habits, and even in doctrinal teaching. Certain customs, harmless in themselves, and perhaps on the whole rather good than otherwise, had come to seem more important, especially as forms of local attachment to local shrines and ceremonies, than the living body of the Catholic truth. It was necessary to examine these things and to correct them in all cases, in some to get rid of them altogether.

Thirdly, and much the most important of all, there was worldliness, widespread among the officers of the Church, in the exact theological sense of "worldliness": the preference of temporal interests to eternal.

A prime example of this was the vested interest in Church endowment, which had come to be bought and sold, inherited, cadged for, much as stocks and shares are today. We have seen how, even in the height of the movement, one of the greatest of the reforming Popes held the revenues of seven Bishoprics, thus deprived of their resident pastors. The revenues of a Bishopric could be given as a salary by a King to one who had served him, who never went near his See and lived perhaps hundreds of miles away. It had come to be normal for a man like Wolsey, for example (and he was only one among many others), to hold two of the first-rate Sees of Christendom in his own hand at the same time: York and Winchester. It had been customary for men like Campeggio, learned, virtuous and an example in their lives to all, to draw the revenues of a Bishopric in England while they themselves were Italians living in Italy and rarely approaching their Sees. The Papal Courts, though their evils have been much exaggerated, were recurrent examples, of which the worst was that of Alexander VI's family, a scandal of the first magnitude to all Christendom.

Every kind of man would violently attack such monstrous abuses with the same zeal as men today, both good and bad, attack the wanton luxury of the rich contrasted with the horrible depths of modern proletarian poverty. It was from all this that the turmoil sprang, and as it increased in violence threatened to destroy the Christian Church itself.

Under the impulse of this universal demand for reform, with passions at work both constructive and destructive, it might well have been that the unity of Christendom should have been preserved. There would have been a great deal of wrangling, perhaps some fighting, but the instinct for unity was so strong, the "patriotism" of Christendom was still so living a force

everywhere that, like as not, we should have ended by the restoration of Christendom and a new and better era for our civilization as the result of purging worldliness in the hierarchy and the manifold corruptions against which the public conscience was seething.

There was no plan in the air at the beginning of the loud protest during the chaotic revolutionary Lutheran outcry in the Germanies, seconded by the humanist outcry everywhere. There was no concerted attack on the Catholic Faith. Even those who were most instinctively its enemies

(Luther himself was not that) and men like Zwingli (who personally hated the central doctrines of the Faith and who led the beginning of the looting of the endowments of religion) could not organize a campaign. There was no constructive doctrine abroad in opposition to the ancient body of doctrine by which our fathers had lived, *until* a man of genius appeared with a book for his instrument, and a violent personal power of reasoning and preaching to achieve his end. This man was a Frenchman, Jean Cauvin (or Calvin), the son of an ecclesiastical official, steward and lawyer to the See of Noyon. After the excommunication of his father for embezzlement and the confiscation by his Bishop of much of the income which he, Jean Calvin, himself enjoyed, he, John, set to work - and a mighty work it was.

It would be unjust to say that the misfortunes of his family and the bitter private money quarrel between himself and the local hierarchy was the main driving force of Calvin's attack. He was already on the revolutionary side in religion; he would perhaps have been in any case a chief figure among those who were for the destruction of the old religion. But whatever his motive, he was certainly the founder of a new religion. For John Calvin it was who set up a counter-Church.

He proved, if ever any man did, the power of logic the triumph of reason, even when abused, and the victory of intelligence over mere instinct and feeling. He framed a complete new theology, strict and consistent, wherein there was no room for priesthood or sacraments; he launched an attack not anti-clerical, not of a negative kind, but positive, just as Mohammed had done nine hundred years before. He was a true heresiarch, and though his effect in the actual imposition of dogma has not had a much longer life than that of Arianism yet the spiritual mood he created has lasted on into our day. All that is lively and effective in the Protestant temper still derives from John Calvin.

Though the iron Calvinist affirmations (the core of which was an admission of evil into the Divine nature by the permission of but One Will in the universe) have rusted away, yet his vision of a Moloch God remains; and the coincident Calvinist devotion to material success, the Calvinist antagonism to poverty and humility, survive in full strength. Usury would not be eating up the modern world but for Calvin nor, but for Calvin, would men debase themselves to accept inevitable doom; nor, but for Calvin, would Communism be with us as it is today, nor, but for Calvin, would Scientific Monism dominate as it (till recently) did the modern world, killing the doctrine of miracle and paralysing Free Will.

This mighty French genius launched his Word nearly twenty years after the religious revolution had begun: round that Word the battle of Church and counter-Church was fought out; and the destruction of Christian unity, which we call the Reformation, was essentially for more

than a century to become the product of a vivid effort, enthusiastic as early Islam had been, to replace the ancient Christian thing by Calvin's new creed. It acted as all revolutions do, by the forming of "cells." Groups arose throughout the West, small highly disciplined societies of men, determined to spread "the Gospel," "the Religion" - it had many names. The intensity of the movement grew steadily, especially in France, the country of its founder.

* * *

The Reformation, unlike all the other great heresies, led to no conclusion, or at least has led to none which we can as yet register, although the first upheaval is now four hundred years behind us. The Arian business slowly died away; but the Protestant business, though its doctrine has disappeared, has borne permanent fruit. It has divided the white civilization into two opposing cultures, Catholic and anti-Catholic.

But at the outset, before this result was reached, the challenge of the reformers led to fierce civil wars. For the better part of a lifetime it looked as though one side or the other (the traditional, orthodox rooted Catholic culture of Europe, or the new revolutionary Protestant thing) would certainly prevail. As a fact, neither prevailed. Europe, after that first violent physical conflict, sank back exhausted, registering victory to neither side and formed into those two halves which have ever since divided the Occident. Great Britain, most of north Germany, certain patches of Germans to the south among the Swiss cantons, and even on the Hungarian plain, remained fixed against Catholicism; so did the northern Netherlands, in their ruling part at least.[2] So did Scandinavia. The main part of the Rhine and the Danube valleys, that is, the southern Germans, most of the Hungarians, the Poles, the Italians, the Spaniards, the Irish, and in the main, the French, were found after the shock still clinging to the ancestral religion which had made our great civilization.

To understand the nature of the confusion and general battle which shook Europe is difficult indeed on account of the manifold factors entering into the conflict.

First of all let us fix the chief dates. The active Reformation, the eruption which followed two lifetimes of premonitory shocks and rumblings broke out in 1517. But fighting between the two opponents did not break out on any considerable scale for forty years. It began in France in 1559. The French religious wars lasted for forty years: *i.e.*, till just on the end of the century. Less than twenty years later the Germans, who had hitherto maintained a precarious balance between the two sides, began *their* religious wars which lasted for thirty years. With the middle of the seventeenth century, *i.e.*, 1648-49, the religious wars in Europe ended in a stalemate.

By 1517 the nations, especially France and England, were already half conscious of their personalities. They expressed their new patriotism by king-worship. They followed their princes as national leaders even in religion. Meanwhile the popular languages began to separate nations still more as the common Latin of the Church grew less familiar. The whole modern state was developing and the modern economic structure, and all the while geographical discovery and physical and mathematical science were expanding prodigiously.

In the midst of so many and such great forces all clashing, it is, I say, difficult indeed to follow the battle as a whole, but I think we can grasp it in its very largest lines if we remember certain main points.

The first is this: that the Protestant movement, which had begun as something merely negative, an indignant revolt against the corruption and worldliness of the official Church, was endowed with a new strength by the creation of Calvinism, twenty years after the upheaval had begun. Though the Lutheran forms of Protestantism covered so great an area, yet the driving power - the centre of vitality - in Protestantism was, after Calvin's book had appeared in 1536, Calvin. It is the spirit of Calvin which actively combats Catholicism wherever the struggle is fierce. It is the spirit of Calvin that inhabited dissident sects and that lent violence to the increasing English minority who were in reaction against the Faith.[3]

Now Calvin was a Frenchman. His mind appealed to others indeed, but principally and first to his compatriots; and that is why you find the first outbreak of violence upon French soil. The religious wars, as they are called, which broke out in France, are conducted there with greater ferocity than elsewhere, and even when a halt is called to them, after half a lifetime of horrors, it is a truce and not a victory. The truce was imposed partly by the fatigue of the combatants in France and partly by the Catholic tenacity of the capital, Paris; but it was a truce only.

Meanwhile, religious war had been staved off among the Germans while it had been raging among the French. The turmoil of the Reformation had led at one moment to a social revolution in some German states, but that soon failed, and for a century after the original rebellion of Luther, a long lifetime after the outbreak of religious civil war in France, the Germans escaped general religious conflict in arms.

This was because the Germans had fallen into a sort of tessellated map of free cities, smaller and larger lordships, little and big states. The whole was under the *nominal* sovereignty of the Emperor in Vienna; but the Emperor had neither income nor feudal levies sufficient to impose his personal power. At long last the Emperor, being challenged by a violent Bohemian (that is, Slav) revolt against him, counter attacked and proposed to re-unite all Germans and impose not only a national unity but a religious unity as well. He would restore Catholicism throughout the German states and their dependencies. He all but succeeded in the attempt. His armies were everywhere victorious, having for their most vigorous recruitment the Spanish troops, who worked with the Emperor because the Crowns at Madrid and Vienna were in the same family - the Hapsburgs.

But two things came in to prevent the triumph of German Catholicism. The first was the character of a usurping family then reigning over the little Protestant state of Sweden. It had produced a military genius of the first order, the young Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus. The second thing which made all the difference was the diplomatic genius of Richelieu, who in those days directed all the policy of France.

The Spanish power in the south beyond the Pyrenees (backed by all the new-found wealth of the Americas, and governing half Italy), the German power of the Empire lying to the east, together threatened France as a nation like the claws of two pincers. Richelieu was a Catholic

cardinal. He was personally attached to the Catholic side in Europe, and yet it was he who launched the Protestant military genius, Gustavus Adolphus, against the German Catholic Emperor, with his Catholic Spanish allies, just when victory was in their grasp.

For Richelieu not only discovered the genius of Gustavus Adolphus but discovered a way of hiring that genius. Richelieu had offered him three tubs of gold. He stood out for five - and got them.

Gustavus Adolphus could not have imagined the great future that was in front of him when he took the French gold as a bribe to attempt the difficult adventure of attacking the prestige and power of the Emperor. Like Napoleon and Cromwell and Alexander and almost all the great captains in history, he discovered his talents as he went along. He must himself have marvelled to find how easily and completely he won his great campaigns.

It is an astonishing story. The brilliant victories only lasted a year; at the end of that year Gustavus Adolphus was killed in action at Lutzen, near Leipsig, in 1632, but in so brief a time he very nearly established a Protestant German Empire. He very nearly did what Bismarck was to do two and a half centuries later; even as it was he made it for ever impossible for Germans to be fully united again, and equally impossible for them to return as a whole to the religion of their fathers. He established German Protestantism so firmly that it went on from that day to this increasing in power, until today (from Berlin) it inspires in a new paganized form the great mass of the German peoples.[4]

The religious wars in Germany gradually petered out. By the middle of the seventeenth century, as I have said, a long lifetime after the first fighting had begun in France, there was a general agreement throughout Europe for each party to stand upon its gains, and the religious map of Europe has remained much the same from that day to this, that is from about 1648-49 to our own time.

Now anyone reading only the outward *military* story, with its first chapter of violent French religious war, its second chapter of violent German religious war, would miss the character of the whole thing, though he knew every battle and every leading statesman and warrior; for there underlay that great affair another factor which was neither doctrinal nor dynastic nor international but *moral*; and it was this factor which provoked fighting, imposed peace, and decided the ultimate religious trend of the various communities. It is recognized by historians but never sufficiently emphasized. *It was the factor of greed.*

The old Catholic Europe, prior to Luther's uprising, had been filled with vast clerical endowments. Rents of land, feudal dues, all manner of incomes, were fixed for the maintenance of bishoprics, cathedral chapters, parish priests, monasteries and nunneries. Not only were there vast incomes, but also endowments (perhaps one-fifth of all the rents of Europe) for every sort of educational establishment, from petty local schools to the great colleges of the universities. There were other endowments for hospitals, others for guilds, (that is, trade unions and associations of craftsmen and merchants and shopkeepers), others for Masses and shrines. All this corporate property was either directly connected with the Catholic Church, or so much part of her patronage as to be under peril of loot wherever the Catholic Church was challenged.

The first act of the Reformers, wherever they were successful, was to allow the rich to seize these funds. And the intensity of the fighting everywhere depended upon the determination of those who had looted the Church to keep their loot, and of those who tried to restore the Church to recover the Church wealth.

That is why in England there was so very little fighting. The English people as a whole were little affected in doctrine by the early Reformation, but the monasteries had been dissolved and their property had passed to the lords of the villages and the town merchants. The same is true of many of the Swiss cantons. The French lords of villages, that is the noble class (what are called in England "the Squires"), and the greater nobles above them, were anxious to share in the loot.

The French Crown, dreading the increase of power which this loot would give to the class immediately below it, resisted the movement, hence the French religious wars; while in England a child King and two women succeeding each other on the throne permitted the rich to get away with the Church spoils. Hence the absence of religious wars in England.

It was this universal robbery of the Church, following upon the religious revolution, which gave the period of conflict the character it had.

It would be a great error to think of the loot of the Church as a mere crime of robbers attacking an innocent victim. The Church endowments had come, before the Reformation, to be treated throughout the greater part of Europe as mere property. Men would buy a clerical income for their sons, or they would make provision for a daughter with a rich nunnery. They would give a bishopric to a boy, purchasing a dispensation for his lack of years. They took the revenues of monasteries wholesale to provide incomes for laymen, putting in a *locum-tenens* to do the work of the abbot, and giving him but a pittance, while the bulk of the endowment was paid for life to the layman who had seized it.

Had not these abuses been already universal the subsequent general loot would not have taken place. As things were, it did. What had been temporary invasions of monastic incomes in order to provide temporary wealth for laymen became permanent confiscation wherever the Reformation triumphed. Even where bishoprics survived the mass of their income was taken away, and when the whole thing was over you may say that the Church throughout what remained of Catholic Europe, even including Italy and Spain, had not a half of its old revenues left. In that part of Christendom which had broken away, the new Protestant ministers and bishops, the new schools, the new colleges, the new hospitals, enjoyed not a tenth of what the old endowments had yielded.

To sum up: By the middle of the seventeenth century the religious quarrel in Europe had been at work, most of the time under arms, for over one hundred and thirty years. Men had now settled down to the idea that unity could never be recovered. The economic strength of religion had, in half of Europe, disappeared, and in the other half so shrunk that the lay power was everywhere master. Europe had fallen into two cultures, Catholic and Protestant; these two cultures would always be instinctively and directly opposed one to the other (as they still are), but the directly religious issue was dropping out and, in despair of a common religion, men were concerning themselves more with temporal, above all with dynastic and national, issues, and

with the capture of opportunities for increasing wealth by trade rather than with matters of doctrine.

* * *

After the middle of the seventeenth century, Europe had witnessed the triumph of a Puritan-officered army in England, the triumph of the German Protestants - through the help of France under Cardinal Richelieu - in their effort to shake themselves free from the Catholic control of the Emperor, and the triumph of the Dutch rebels against Catholic Spain. Europe fell back exhausted from the purely religious struggle. The wars of religion were at an end; they had ended in a draw: neither side had won. Religious conflict had remained in patches. Thus England tried to kill Catholic Ireland and France to kill French Huguenotry. But by 1700 it was clear no more national wars of religion would arise.

Henceforward it was taken for granted that our civilization must continue divided. There was to be a Protestant culture side by side with the Catholic culture. Men could not lose the memory of the great past; they did not quickly become what we have since become - nations growing indifferent to the unity of European civilization - but the old moral unity which came of our universal Catholicism was ruined.

Roughly speaking, the mass of Europe fell into the following form:

The Greek or Orthodox Church of the East had ceased to count. Russia had not arisen as a power, and everywhere else the Greek Christians were dominated by, and subject to, Moslems, so that the only map to be considered in 1650 was one stretching from Poland on the East to the Atlantic on the West.

In that region the Italian peninsula, divided into various states, was wholly Catholic save for a very small population in some of the northern mountains which had Protestant forms of worship.

The Iberian peninsula - Spain and Portugal - was also wholly Catholic. The Empire, as it was called, that is, the body of states, most of which spoke German and of which the moral head was the Emperor at Vienna, was divided into Protestant states and self-governing cities, and Catholic states and self-governing cities. The Emperor had tried to bring them all back to Catholicism and had failed, because of the diplomacy of Richelieu.

In mere numbers, as the Protestant German population was as yet much smaller than the Catholic. Roughly speaking, the northern German states and cities were Protestant and the southern Catholic - not, as is falsely pretended, because something in the northern climate or race tended to Protestantism, but because they lay further away from the centre of Catholic power in Vienna. Though the various "Germanies" (as the German-speaking states and cities were called) were thus roughly divided into Protestant North and Catholic South, there were any number of exceptions, islands of Catholic population in the North and Protestant in the South, and often the citizens of one city were divided in religion.

Scandinavia, that is, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, were by this time wholly Protestant. Poland, though it had never formed part of the Roman Empire, went Catholic after a sort of see-saw and hesitation during the time of the religious wars. It has remained one of the most intensely Catholic districts of the world ever since, because, like the Irish, the Poles were violently persecuted for their religion.

The Low Countries had divided into two. The northern provinces (which we now call Holland) had acquired their independence from their original sovereign, the King of Spain, and, largely as a protest against the Spanish power, proclaimed themselves officially Protestant. Their government was Protestant and the political effect of Holland in Europe was Protestant; but it is a great error, though a very common one, to think that the Dutch population as a whole was Protestant. There was a very large Catholic minority and today, of the Christian population that is the population so declared - over two-fifths but rather less than one-half are Catholic.

The southern provinces of the ancient Netherlands remained solidly of the Catholic culture. They had joined in the revolt against Spain, but when the northern merchants and rich landowners went Calvinist in order to emphasize the struggle with Spain, the merchants and rich men of the southern provinces reacted strongly the other way. Today we call this Catholic half of the Netherlands Belgium, but it included in the middle of the seventeenth century a strip of what is today French Flanders; for instance, the great town of Lille, the chief city of Flanders, was part of the Catholic and still Spanish Netherlands.

The Swiss Cantons, which were gradually becoming a nation and already mainly independent of the Empire, were divided; some were of the Protestant culture, some of the Catholic - as they remain to this day.

France, after the compromise at the end of the religious wars and the victory of Richelieu over the Huguenots, became officially Catholic. The French monarchy was strongly Catholic and the mass of the nation was of the Catholic culture. But there remained a minority of Protestants, important in numbers (no one knows quite how many, but probably, as we saw on a former page, less than a seventh but more than a tenth of the nation) and far more important in wealth and social position than in numbers. The Protestants in France were also important because they were not confined to one district but were to be found all over the place; for instance, Dieppe, the harbour in the north, was still a strongly Protestant town. So was La Rochelle, the harbour on the Atlantic; so, especially, were many prosperous southern towns such as Montpellier and Nimes. Much of the banking and commerce of France remained in Protestant hands.

England and Scotland in 1650 had been under a common monarch for half a century and were both officially Protestant. This English-Scotch monarchy was strongly Protestant, and there was continual and heavy persecution of Catholicism. But it is another common error to regard the English nation as a whole as being already Protestant at this moment. What was really happening was the dying down of Catholicism very gradually. Perhaps a third of the nation was still vaguely in sympathy with the old religion when the civil wars began, and a sixth of it was willing to make heavy sacrifices by calling itself openly Catholic. Of the officers killed in action on both sides, about one-sixth were estimated to be admittedly and openly Catholics. But it was

impossible for the ordinary man to get the Sacraments, and difficult even for rich men, who could afford to pay for private chapels, fines, etc., to get Mass and the Catholic Communion.

None the less, so strong was the ancient root of Catholicism in England that there were constant conversions, especially in the upper classes. For nearly forty years to come it looked as though a very large, solid minority of Catholicism might survive in England, as it had in Holland.

On the other hand, England and Scotland were not only officially Protestant, but a growing majority had come to think of Catholicism as alien to the interests of the country, and a very large and growing minority was filled with a more violent hatred of Catholicism than you could find anywhere else in Europe.

Ireland of course remained Catholic; the number of Protestants present in Ireland, even after the plantations and the conquest by Cromwell, was not one-twentieth of the population. But nineteen-twentieths of the land had been taken by force from the Irish and Catholic people and was now (1650) either in the possession of renegades or of Protestant adventurers from Great Britain, to whom the original owners of the land now had to pay rent or for whom they had to work at a wage.

From this moment, the mid-seventeenth century, when elsewhere there had arisen compromise throughout Europe in the matter of religion, Catholicism was persecuted in Ireland in the most violent fashion, and in a fashion which got more violent as time went on. All the power, very nearly all the land, and most of the liquid wealth of Ireland were in the hands not only of Protestants but of people determined to destroy Catholicism. For a long time to come it was as though Ireland were a test; as though the destruction of the Catholic Church in Ireland were to be a symbol of the triumph of Protestantism and the decline of the Faith. That destruction was nearly accomplished - but not quite.

Such was the map of Europe as the drawn battle of religious wars had left it.

But apart from the geographical division, the effect of the long struggle, and particularly the fact that it had been inconclusive, was on the moral side more profound than on the geographical.

It was obvious to the eye that European culture would in future be divided into two camps, but what only gradually entered the mind of Europe was the fact that on account of this permanent division men were coming to regard religion itself as a secondary thing. Political considerations, the ambition of separate nations and separate dynasties, began to seem more important than the separate religions men professed. It was as though people had said to themselves, not openly, but half-consciously, "Since all this tremendous fight has had no result, the causes which led to the conflict were probably exaggerated."

In the only department that counts, in the mind of man, the effect of the religious wars and their ending in a drawn battle was that religion as a whole was weakened. More and more men began to think in their hearts, "One cannot arrive at the truth in these matters, but we *do* know what worldly prosperity is and what poverty is, and what political power and political weakness

are. Religious doctrine belongs to an unseen world which we do not know as thoroughly or in the same way."

That was the prime fruit of the battles not having been won and of the two antagonists virtually consenting to fall back on their positions. There was still plenty of religious fervour on both sides, but in a subtle, undeclared way it was more and more subordinated to worldly motives, especially to patriotism and greed.

Meanwhile, though men did not observe it for a long time, a certain result of this success which Protestantism had obtained, this establishment and entrenching of itself over against the old religion, was working under the surface and was soon to come clearly to light. The Protestant culture, though it remained for another lifetime much smaller numerically than the Catholic culture, and even as a whole poorer, had more vitality. It had begun in a religious revolution; the eagerness of that revolution carried on and inspired it. It had broken up old traditions and bonds which had formed the framework of Catholic society for hundreds of years. The social stuff of Europe was dissolved in the Protestant culture more thoroughly than in the Catholic, and its dissolution released energies which Catholicism had restrained, especially the energy of competition.

All forms of innovation were naturally more favoured in the Protestant culture than in the Catholic; both cultures advanced rapidly in the physical sciences, in the colonization of distant lands, in the expansion of Europe throughout the world; but the Protestants were more vigorous in all these than were the Catholics.

To take one example: in the Protestant culture (save where it was remote and simple) the free peasant, protected by ancient customs, declined. He died out because the old customs which supported him against the rich were broken up. Rich men acquired the land; great masses of men formerly owning farms became destitute. The modern proletariat began and the seeds of what we today call Capitalism were sown. We can see now what an evil that was, but at the time it meant that the land was better cultivated. New and more scientific methods were more easily applied by the rich landowners of the new Protestant culture than by the Catholic traditional peasantry; and, competition being unchecked, the former triumphed.

Again, inquiry tended to be more free in the Protestant culture than in the Catholic, because there was no one united authority of doctrine; and though in the long run this was bound to lead to the break-up of philosophy and of all sound thinking, the first effects were stimulating and vitalizing.

But the great, the chief, example of what was happening through the break-up of the old Catholic European unity, was the rise of banking.

Usury was practised everywhere, but in the Catholic culture it was restricted by law and practised with difficulty. In the Protestant culture it became a matter of course. The Protestant merchants of Holland led the way in the beginnings of *modern* banking; England followed suit; and that is why the still comparatively small Protestant nations began to acquire formidable economic strength. Their mobile capital and credit kept on increasing compared with their total

wealth. The mercantile spirit flourished vigorously among the Dutch and English, and the universal admission of competition continued to favour the growth of the Protestant side of Europe.

All this increase of Protestant power was becoming clear in the lifetime after the Peace of Westphalia (1648-50 to 1720). It was no longer subconscious but conscious, and was felt everywhere as the first third of the eighteenth century progressed. Before the middle of that century there was a feeling in the air that although Catholicism still held the ancient thrones, with all their traditional glory and show of strength the Imperial Crown, the Papal States, the Spanish Monarchy with its huge dominions overseas, the splendid French Monarchy - yet the future was with the Protestants, Protestantism, to use the modern phrase, was "making good."

Moreover confidence was on the Protestant side, and the Catholic side was disheartened. One last factor was greatly in favour of the Protestant culture: the decline of religious feeling was going on everywhere after 1750, and this decline of religion did not, *at first*, hurt Protestant society as much as it hurt Catholic society. In Catholic society it divided men bitterly one from the other. The sceptic was there the enemy of his pious fellow-countryman. France, to some extent Italy, much later Spain - but France early in the business - were divided against themselves, while in the Protestant culture difference of opinion and scepticism were commonplaces. Men took them for granted. They led less and less to personal animosities and civil division.

This internal strength the Protestant culture retained on into modern times and has only now begun to lose it, through the gradually disintegrating effect of a false philosophy.

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Rather more than a hundred and fifty years ago, but less than two hundred - say between 1760 and 1770 - it should have been clear to any close observer of our civilization that we were entering a period in which the anti-Catholic side of the two halves into which Christendom had split was about to become the chief party. The Protestant culture was about to get the upper hand and would perhaps keep it for a long time. It did as a fact not only keep it but increased its hold for more than a full lifetime - for something like a hundred years. Then - but not till our own times - it declined.

The outward or political signs of this Protestant growth were continued increase of financial, military and naval power on that side of Europe. English commerce rapidly expanded; the Dutch continued to increase their banking and, most important of all, England began to get hold of India. On the military side, the Protestant Germans produced a new and formidable army, that of Prussia, with a strong discipline crowned by victory.

Something that was to have a great effect - the British fleet - became far more powerful than any other, and under its protection English trade and control over the East continually grew. By land Prussia began to win battles and campaigns; these successes of Prussia were not continuous but they founded a continuous tradition, and her Soldier-King, Frederick II, was certainly one of the great captains of history.

Meanwhile the Catholic culture declined in this same political field.

Austria, that is, the power of the Catholic Emperor among Germans, diminished in strength; so did the vast Spanish Empire, which included at that time much the greater part of populated America.

These material outward signs of increasing Protestant power and the declining power of the Catholic culture were but the effects of a spiritual thing which was going on within. Faith was breaking down.

The Protestant culture was untroubled by this growth of scepticism. The decline of men's adherence to the old doctrines of Christendom did not weaken Protestant society. The whole tone of mind in that society called every man free to judge for himself, and the one thing it repudiated and would not have was the authority of a common religion.

A common religion is of the nature of the Catholic culture, and so the growing decline of belief worked havoc there. It destroyed the moral authority of the Catholic governments, which were closely associated with religion, and it either cast a sort of paralysis over thought and action, as happened in Spain, or, as happened in France, violently divided men into two camps, clerical and anti-clerical.

Still, though we can see what was at work in the eighteenth century, the men of the time did not. England through her sea-power had got a stranglehold on India; Prussia had established herself as a strong power; but no one foresaw that England and Prussia would overshadow Christendom. India was going to produce wealth and power for those who should exploit her and, with her as a base, establish their banking power and commerce throughout the East. Prussia was going to absorb the Germans and overthrow Europe.

England (also through her naval power) had got hold of the French colony of Canada; but no one in those days thought colonies of much importance save as sources of wealth for the mother country, and Canada had never been that for France. Later, when England lost her own colonies in North America and they became independent, it was wrongly regarded as a mortal blow to English power throughout the world.

Very few foresaw what the new republic in North America was going to mean for the future; its vast and rapid expansion in numbers and wealth immensely strengthened the position of the Protestant culture in the world. It was much later that a certain proportion of Catholic immigrants somewhat modified this position, but even so, the United States remained during their astonishing increase an essentially Protestant society.

At the end of the eighteenth century and into the beginning of the nineteenth came the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. These also increased the general strength of Protestantism and still further weakened the Catholic culture. They did so indirectly, and the immediate issues were so much more exciting and so much more directly concerned men's lives that this ultimate and profound effect was little appreciated.

To this day there are few historians who appreciate the defeat of Napoleon in terms of contrasting cultures in Europe. The French Revolution was an anti-clerical movement, and Napoleon who was its heir was not himself a believing and practicing Catholic and cannot be said to have returned to the Faith until his death-bed. Nor, for all his genius, did he clearly perceive that difference of religion is at the root of differences in culture, for the generation to which he belonged had no conception of that profound and universal judgment.

Nevertheless the truth remains that had Napoleon succeeded the preponderating culture of Europe would have been Catholic. His Empire inter-married with and allied to the ancient Catholic tradition of Austria, giving the Church peace and ending the revolutionary dangers, would have given us a united and settled Europe, where, in spite of the very wide spread of rationalism in the wealthier classes, Europe as a whole would have returned to the Catholic tradition.

Napoleon, however, just failed; and he failed through miscalculating his chances in the campaign in Russia.

After his failure the process of decline, so long at work in the Catholic culture, continued throughout all the nineteenth century. England as the result of the defeat of Napoleon was able to expand uninterruptedly through her now not only unquestioned but invincible sea-power. There was no rival against her anywhere outside Europe. The Spanish Empire, already fallen very low, was broken up, largely through the efforts of England, which desired unimpeded trade with South and Central America. England seized points of vantage all over the globe, some of which became considerable local societies at first called colonies but now "Dominations."

Prussia, through the defeat of Napoleon, became the leading power among the Germans; she annexed the Catholic population of the Rhine and became the triumphant rival of the Hapsburg-Lorraine House, the Emperor at Vienna. France fell into unceasing political experiment and breakdown, at the root of which was the profound religious division between Frenchmen.

There was no united Italy, and such effort as was being made to create one was being made by anti-Catholics. Indeed, it is one of the most amusing ironies of history that the great power which Italy has now become was largely called into being by the sympathy Protestant Europe felt for the original Italian rebellions against the Catholic King of Naples and the authority of the Papal States.

One working lifetime after the defeat of Napoleon another weighty group of events was thrown into the scale against the Catholic culture; this was the series of crushing victories won by Prussia in the field, between 1866 and 1871. In those five years Prussia destroyed the military power of Catholic Austria and created a new German Empire in which the Catholics were carefully cut off from Austria and formed into a minority with Protestant Berlin as their centre of gravity. Prussia also suddenly and completely defeated the French Army, took Paris and annexed what suited her of French territory.

This last business, the Franco-Prussian War, was far the most important of all, and might well have proved the end of the Catholic culture in Europe, through the establishment of the

Parliamentary French Republic (which went from bad to worse in laws and morals) and from the undermining of the confidence the French had in themselves. The new regime in France began to ruin French civilization and increased indefinitely the anti-Catholic faction, which obtained and kept external power over the French people. Moreover, as a result of that war, England became stronger still in the East, she took the place of France as the master in Egypt, taking over the custody of the Suez Canal (which the French had made just before their final defeat) and acquiring Cyprus.

Italy was now united but weak and despised. Spain and Portugal had declined, it seemed, beyond all hope of recovery; and with France torn by her religious quarrel and having the worst kind of professional politicians in power, with the sun of Austria setting, with Prussia in full career, with the United States now recovering from its Civil War and more powerful and coherent than ever - rapidly becoming the richest country in the world and with a population as rapidly expanding - it seemed a matter of course that the Catholic culture would be beaten right out of the field. The Protestant culture had become the manifest leader of white civilization.

The thing was apparent not only politically but in the economic field as well. The new machinery which transformed life everywhere, the new rapid communications of thought and goods and men, were mainly the product of the Protestant culture. The nations of Catholic culture did but copy the Protestant nations in these matters.

So it was also with institutions; the English institution of Parliament which had arisen and was maintained under aristocratic conditions by a governing class, was imitated everywhere. It was utterly unsuited to societies with a strong sense of human equality, but such was the prestige of England that men copied English institutions upon every side.

Meanwhile what may properly be called the test of the fortunes of the Catholic culture, Ireland, seemed to give the signal of that culture's final ruin. The Irish population, long dispossessed of its land, was halved by famine; the wealth of Catholic Ireland fell as rapidly as that of England rose, and no one of consequence thought it was possible that Ireland, after her awful experiences in the nineteenth century, could rise again from the dead.

The Pope had been despoiled of his income through the seizure of his States, and was now a prisoner in the Vatican with all the spirit of the new Italian Government, his apparent master, more and more opposed to religion. The educational system of Europe grew more and more divorced from religion, and in the large Catholic countries either broke up or fell wholly into anti-Catholic hands.

* * *

It is very difficult to say when the tide turns in the great processes of history. But one rule may be wisely applied; the turn of the tide comes earlier than men judging by surface phenomena conceive. Any great system - the actively centralized Western Roman Empire, the Spanish Empire, the period of Turkish rule in the East, the period of the absolute Monarchies of Western Europe - has really begun to break down long before the outside observer can note any change. For instance, as late as 1630 men were still talking and thinking of the Spanish power as much

the greatest thing in the world; yet it had received its death blow in Holland a lifetime before, and was after Rocroi (1643) slowly bleeding to death.

It was and is so with the Protestant hegemony over our culture, with the Protestant and anti-Catholic leadership of white civilization. The tide has turned. But what was the moment of change? When was "slack water"?

It is difficult to fix a date for these things, but a universal rule is that, in doubt between two dates, the earlier date is to be preferred to the later.

Many would put the years 1899-1901, the ominous Boer War, as the turning point. Some would put it later. For my part, I should fix it round about the years 1885-1887. It seems to me that a universal observer, unbiased by patriotic feeling, would fix that moment - or 1890 at the latest - as the point of flexion in the curve. The Protestant powers were apparently greater than ever; but a reaction was stirring and in the next generation it was bound to become apparent.

Whatever the causes and whatever the precise dates to be fixed (certainly somewhere between 1885 and 1904) the tide was turning. It was not turning toward the re-establishment of the Catholic culture as the leader of Europe, let alone to the re-establishment of the Catholic Church as the universal spirit of that culture; but the ideas and the things which had made the opposite culture all-powerful were breaking down. This modern decline of the Protestant hegemony and its succession by an altogether new menace - and a new Catholic reaction against that menace - I shall now describe.

* * *

Whatever date we assign to the summit of power in the Protestant culture, whether we say that its decay was beginning as early as 1890 or that it cannot be put earlier than even 1904,[5] there is no doubt that after this date - in other words, with the very first years of the twentieth century - the supremacy of the Protestant culture was undermined.

The various Protestant heresies upon which it had been based, and the general spirit of all those heresies combined, were declining; therefore their fruit, the Protestant hegemony over Europe and the white world, was declining also. Protestantism was being strangled at its root, at its spiritual root; therefore the material fruits of that tree were beginning to wither.

When we study in detail the process of this veiled decay in the supremacy of the Protestant culture we find two sets of causes. The first, and apparently the least important (though posterity may discover it to be of great importance), was a certain recovery of confidence in a *portion* (but only a portion) of the nations deriving from the Catholic culture, and at the same time a revival of vitality in Catholic teaching.

Politically there was no reaction towards the old strength of the Catholic culture; it was rather the other way. Ireland continued to decline in population and wealth, and was now more subject to a Protestant power than ever before. Poland could apparently no longer hope for resurrection. The divisions within the Catholic culture itself grew worse than ever. In France (which was the

keystone of the whole) the quarrel between the Church and her enemies became taken for granted and the victory of these enemies taken for granted as well. Religion was dying out in the elementary schools. Great tracts of the peasantry were losing their ancestral faith; and with the decline of religion went a decline of taste in architecture and all the arts - and worst of all in letters. The old French lucidity of thought began to grow confused. There was no revival of Spain, and in Italy, what with anti-clerical and Masonic Parliamentary power and the differences between the various districts, yet another province of Catholic culture grew weaker.

But there was already apparent some revival of religion in the wealthier classes among all the nations of Catholic culture.

This might not seem to mean much, for the wealthier classes are a small minority; but they influenced the universities and therefore the literature and philosophy of their generation. Where, half a lifetime before, anyone would have told you that Catholicism could never again appear in the University of Paris there were evident signs that it was again being taken very seriously. In all this the great Pope Leo XIII played a chief part, seconded by him who was later to become Cardinal Mercier. St. Thomas Aquinas was rehabilitated and the University of Louvain became a focus of intellectual energy radiating throughout Western Europe.

Still, all this was, I repeat, of less significance than the decline of the Protestant culture from within. The Catholic culture continued to be divided; there were no signs of its returning to its great rôle in the past; and though the seeds both of Irish and Polish recovery had been sown (the former through the very important recovery of their land by the tenacious Irish peasantry) no one could have foretold - as indeed most cannot yet perceive - the strengthening of the Catholic culture as a whole throughout our civilization.

There were great converts, as there have always been; there were what is even more significant, whole groups of very eminent men, such as Brunetière in France, who grew less and less sympathetic with the old-fashioned atheism and agnosticism, and who, without declaring themselves Catholic, were clearly sympathetic with the Catholic side. But these did not influence the main current; what really made the change was the great internal weakness of the Protestant culture as opposed to the Catholic. It was this decay of the opponent to the Church which began to transform Europe and prepare men for yet another great change, which I shall call (so as to give it a name and be able to study it later) "The Modern Phase."

Protestant culture decayed from within from a number of causes, all probably connected, although it is difficult to trace the connection; all probably proceeding from what physicists call the "auto-toxic" condition of the Protestant culture. We say that an organism has become "auto-toxic" when it is beginning to poison itself, when it loses vigour in its vital processes and accumulates secretions which continually lessen its energies. Something of this kind was happening to the Protestant culture towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

This was the general cause of the Protestant decline, but its action was vague and hard to grasp; on the *particular* causes of that decline we may be more concrete and certain.

For one thing the spiritual basis of Protestantism went to pieces through the breakdown of the Bible as a supreme authority. This breakdown was the result of that very spirit of sceptical inquiry upon which Protestantism had always been based. It had begun by saying, "I deny the authority of the Church: every man must examine the credibility of every doctrine for himself." But it had taken as a prop (illogically enough) the Catholic doctrine of Scriptural inspiration. That great mass of Jewish folklore, poetry and traditional popular history and proverbial wisdom which we call the Old Testament, that body of records of the Early Church which we call the New Testament, the Catholic Church had declared to be Divinely inspired. Protestantism (as we all know) turned this very doctrine of the Church against the Church herself, and appealed to the Bible against Catholic authority.

Hence the Bible - Old and New Testaments combined - became an object of worship in itself throughout the Protestant culture. There was a great deal of doubt and even paganism floating about before the end of the nineteenth century in the nations of Protestant culture; but the mass of their populations, in Germany as in England and Scandinavia, certainly in the United States, anchored themselves to the literal interpretation of the Bible.

Now historical research, research in physical science and research in textual criticism, shook this attitude. The Protestant culture began to go to the other extreme; from having worshipped the very text of the Bible as something immutable and the clear voice of God, it fell to doubting almost everything that the Bible contained.

It questioned the authenticity of the four Gospels, particularly the two written by eyewitnesses to the life of Our Lord and more especially that of St. John, the prime witness to the Incarnation.

It came to deny the historical value of nearly everything in the Old Testament prior to the Babylonian exile; it denied as a matter of course every miracle from cover to cover and every prophecy.

That a document should contain prophecy was taken to prove that it must have been written *after* the event. Every inconvenient text was labelled as an interpolation. In fine, when this spirit (which was the very product of Protestantism itself) had done with the Bible - the very foundation of Protestantism - it had left nothing of Protestantism but a mass of ruins.

There was also another example of the spirit of Protestantism destroying its own foundations, but in a different field that of social economics.

Protestantism had produced free competition permitting usury and destroying the old safeguards of the small man's property - the guild and the village association.

In most places where it was powerful (and especially in England) Protestantism had destroyed the peasantry altogether. It had produced modern industrialism in its capitalistic form; it had produced modern banking, which at last became the master of the community; but not much more than a lifetime's experience of industrial capitalism and of the banker's usurious power was enough to show that neither the one nor the other could continue. They had bred vast social evils which went from bad to worse, until men, without consciously appreciating the ultimate cause of

those evils (which cause is, of course, spiritual and religious) at any rate found the evils unendurable.

But the later wealth and political power of the Protestant culture had been based upon these very institutions, now challenged.

Industrial capitalism and the usurious banking power were the very strength of nineteenth-century Protestant civilization. They had especially triumphed in Victorian England. They are, at the moment in which I write these words, still on the surface all-powerful - but we every one of us know that their hour has struck. They have rotted from within; and with them the Protestant hegemony which they so powerfully supported in the generations immediately before our own.

There was yet another cause of weakening and decline in the Protestant culture: the various parts of it tended to quarrel one with the other. That was what one would have expected from a system at once based upon competition and flattering human pride. The various Protestant societies, notably the British and Prussian, were each convinced of its own complete superiority. But you cannot have two or more superior races. This mood of self-worship necessarily led to conflict between the self-worshippers. They might all combine in despising the Catholic culture, but they could not preserve unity among themselves.

The trouble was made worse by an inherent lack of plan. The Protestant culture having begun by exaggerating the power of human reason, was ending by abandoning human reason. It boasted its dependence upon instinct and even upon good fortune. There was no commoner phrase upon the lips of Protestant Englishmen than the phrase, "We are not a logical nation." Each Protestant group was "God's country" - God's favourite - and somehow or other was bound to come out on top without the bother of thinking out a scheme for its own conduct.

Nothing more fatal for an individual or a large society in the long run can be conceived than this blind dependence upon an assured good fortune, and an equally blind neglect of rational processes. It opens the door to every extravagance, material and spiritual; to conceptions of universal dominion, world power and the rest of it, which in their effect are mortal poisons.

All these things combined led to the great breakdown which we date overtly from 1914 but of which the inception lay three years earlier at least; for it was three years before the outbreak of the Great War that the nations began to make their preparations for conflict.

In the Great War, of course, the whole of the old state of affairs went down with a crash. So much as survived what had been the institutions of the Protestant hegemony - control by the banks, the levying of general usury through international loans, the wholly competitive industrial system, the unchecked exploitation of a vast proletariat by a small capitalist class only survived precariously, propped up by every sort of device, and that in only a few societies. In the mass of our civilization these things rapidly disappeared. The main political institution which had gone with them - parliaments composed of professional politicians and calling themselves "representative" - went down the same road. Our civilization began to enter a period of political experiments, including despotisms, each of which experiments may be and probably is ephemeral, but all of which are, at any rate, a complete break with the immediate past.

The old white world wherein a divided and distracted Catholic culture was overshadowed by a triumphant and powerful Protestant culture was no more.

But let it be noted that this breakdown of the older anti-Catholic thing, the Protestant culture, shows no sign of being followed by an hegemony of the Catholic culture. There is no sign as yet of a reaction towards the domination of Catholic ideas - the full restoration of the Faith by which Europe and all our civilization can alone be saved.

It nearly always happens that when you get rid of one evil you find yourself faced with another hitherto unsuspected; and so it is now with the breakdown of the Protestant hegemony. We are entering a new phase, "The Modern Phase," as I have called it, in which very different problems face the Eternal Church and a very different enemy will challenge her existence and the salvation of the world which depends upon her. What that modern phase is I shall now attempt to analyse.

ENDNOTES

1. How large this minority was at various dates 1625, 1660, 1685 is debatable, and further confused by the use of similar words for dissimilar things. If we are speaking of the English minority that was actively Catholic in tradition though not fully agreed on Papal claims, people who would have called themselves Catholic rather than Protestant, we have certainly half the population at Elizabeth's death, but only an eighth at the exile of James II eighty-five years later. If we mean all those who would have accepted without hostility a return to the old religion we have, even at the end of 1688, a much larger body. It is difficult to estimate, for men do not leave record of their vaguest opinions, but to say that England still had one such person in four at that date is no great exaggeration. I have given my reasons in my book on James II.

2. This district seven out of the 16 Spanish Netherland Provinces, have come to call Holland, after one province alone.

3. A minority till the last years of Elizabeth, but after 1606 an increasing majority opposed the faith because by that time, opposition to the faith had become identified with Patriotism.

4. What is called "Hitlerism" or "Nazism" today, whatever its future fate, is a despotic and powerful control established by the Prussian spirit over all the Reich.

5. 1904 was the year of the diplomatic change by which England gave up her age-long alliance with Protestant Prussia and began, with much misgiving and against the grain, to support France.